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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CROP CONDITIONS IN THE SOVIET BLOC

CIA/RR IM-367

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FOREWORD

The following report on the condition of growing crops in the Soviet Bloc is the result of the analysis of information on weather and other factors affecting yield that was available on 30 June for the USSR and 31 July for the European Satellites and China. As a qualitative report it reflects, in a general way, the prospects for the food supply of the Soviet Bloc for the consumption year 1 July 1952 through 30 June 1953. Quantitative estimates of production based on acreage as well as yield will be made in a later report. Until then, these general statements regarding conditions affecting crop development are indicative of the Bloc's field crop potential as of the dates specified.

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Summary

Considering the Bloc as a whole, crop production for 1952 is expected to be about equal to that of 1951. Production in the USSR and China may exceed 1951, and that of the European Satellites is expected to be lower. If current prospects are realized, the food position of the USSR and China will be relatively more favorable than in any year since World War II. On the other hand, the current drought throughout the European Satellites may appreciably decrease their food supplies.

USSR.

Based on weather and crop information available as of 30 June 1952, crop conditions in the USSR were as favorable as, if not slightly better than, crop conditions as of the same date in 1951. The 1951 crop was the largest since the war, reaching 87 percent of the 1935-39 average annual production of grain.

During the sowing and growing season there was considerable variation in weather conditions among the various regions of the USSR. In general, the late summer and fall of 1951 were characterized by below-normal precipitation. Snowfall during the first part of the winter, through January, appears to have been light, but in succeeding months the amount of snow increased considerably in many areas.

Growth of grains was retarded this spring by cool weather, and the heading stage occurred 1 to 3 weeks later than last year. A cold spell occurred in mid-May, quite similar to that experienced in May 1951. The cold spell does not appear, however, to have been of sufficient intensity to damage grains, but it definitely had a retarding effect on crop development.

In 1951, precipitation was below normal in July and August in much of the important potato and sugar beet area, and yields were thus adversely affected. Precipitation and temperature conditions at that time are critical in their effect on potato and sugar beet yields, and tuber and root formation occurs during these months. As of 1 July, growth conditions did not appear to be favorable in Belorussia and the Baltic Region, which are important potato-producing areas.

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Growth conditions in the North Ukraine and Central European USSR, important potato and sugar beet areas, were somewhat better.

European Satellites.

As a result of an adverse growing season, the outlook, as of 30 July, for the 1952-53 food supply in Eastern Europe, is not so good as the prospect was on the same date in 1951. Corn, sugar, meat, fats, and oils will probably be in shorter supply during the 1952-53 food consumption year than in 1951-52.

Agricultural production in 1952 will be below 1951, a year in which grain production equaled or nearly equaled the prewar level. The production of bread grains will be slightly less, and coarse grains (primarily corn) may be substantially below 1951 should the present drought persist. Yields of root, forage, and industrial crops also will suffer from this drought.

China.

Growing conditions in China and Manchuria through July 1952 may be regarded as having been average, or perhaps slightly above average. The wheat harvest was good; prospects are favorable for rice; and, if current growing and harvesting conditions continue, the 1952 food production will probably exceed the 1951 level.

I. USSR.

In the Ukraine, precipitation in June was greater in 1952 than in 1951, although amounts in May were slightly less than in 1951. In view of the somewhat later development of the grains in 1952, the increased June precipitation was beneficial. Crop prospects in the Ukraine thus appear to be fully as favorable as last year. Information obtained from the Soviet agricultural press and other sources tend to confirm this favorable outlook.

In the North Caucasus, precipitation in May and June appears to have been sufficient to insure good yields. Crop prospects compare quite favorably with those of 1951. Agricultural officials of the American Embassy on a trip to this area in early July reported that fall-seeded grains in the Kuban appeared in excellent shape. In certain other areas of the North Caucasus, fall-seeded grains appear to be more

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spotty because of the dry fall in 1951, and efforts have been made to reseed some of these areas this spring.

Crop conditions in the Volga area are better in 1952 than they were at the corresponding time in 1951. May and June precipitation was above normal in much of this area and in places considerably above normal. There were reports of a dry fall in 1951, but, during the winter, areas which normally have very little snowcover received substantial amounts of snow.

Precipitation in May and June in the Central Black Soil Belt of Central European USSR appears to have been sufficient in most oblasts to insure a good crop, perhaps better than in 1951. The eastern oblasts of this belt in particular had substantial amounts of precipitation. In the remaining oblasts of Central European USSR, precipitation in May was above normal in many oblasts. Precipitation in June was less than in the oblasts of the Central Black Soil Belt but generally greater than in June 1951. In view of the delayed season, an increase in precipitation in July in this area would assume greater significance in determining the ultimate yield. The oblasts adjoining the Baltic Region and Belorussia had less than normal precipitation, and crop conditions in these oblasts are not very favorable.

In Belorussia and the Baltic Region a dry fall in 1951, followed by a winter with less-than-normal snowfall and far-below-normal precipitation in the critical months of May and June 1952, substantially reduced crop prospects. The combined precipitation in May and June in much of this area appears to have been less than 3 inches. US Embassy agricultural officials traveling in Belorussia in mid-May commented on the delayed spring and the short uneven growth of fall-seeded rye. Pastures also were reported to be less lush than at the same time last year. All grain yields in this area probably will be less than last year, particularly winter grain yields.

Precipitation in the Urals in April 1952 was greater than in April 1951 but precipitation in May was less throughout the whole area. In June, precipitation was greater than in 1951 in the northern oblasts but less in the south. As of 30 June, conditions on the whole do not appear to be quite as favorable as they were at the corresponding time in 1951. However, in view of the delayed season, the precipitation in July will assume greater significance this year.

In West Siberia and northern Kazakh SSR, precipitation in April was slightly higher in 1952 than in 1951 but less in May and June. Reports from this area are more sparse than in the areas described previously, but on the basis of reports received thus far the crop

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prospects on the whole do not appear to be exceptionally favorable. Increased precipitation in July could do much to remedy this situation.

II. European Satellites.

In order to simplify the presentation and to group countries having similar cropping systems, conditions, etc., the European Satellites have been divided into two areas -- northern and southern. The northern area includes the following countries: East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia; the southern, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Albania.

1. Northern Area (East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia).

A drought in the fall of 1951 (September and December) reduced the sown acreage and adversely affected germination of winter-sown grains (wheat and rye) throughout most of the area. Poland probably suffered more than East Germany or Czechoslovakia. Deep-plowing plans were not fulfilled: that is, official Czech statements claimed that the machine-tractor stations (MTS) had completed only 50 percent of their work as of 6 December 1951.

Spring plowing and planting operations were delayed by snow, rain, and cold weather in February, March, and the first part of April. Favorable planting weather prevailed from 15 April to approximately 17 May, when an abnormal 2-week period of cold and rain with frost swept over most of the area. The frost damaged early vegetables and fruit crops and retarded the growth of cereals.

Incomplete weather data indicates normal and below-normal amounts of precipitation for the months of June and July, respectively. Although low precipitation and high temperatures in July were favorable conditions for harvesting, the lack of soil moisture could prove serious for late-planted vegetables (some replanted as a result of May frost), corn, forage, and root crops. Poland, as of 30 July, had experienced a 5-week period with little or no rain.

Grain yields probably will be slightly less than in 1951 because of the unfavorable planting and growing season for winter grains. Should the present dry spell continue into August, a severe reduction in yields of corn, potatoes, sugar beets, and forage crops will occur.

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2. Southern Area (Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Albania).

The fall of 1951 was characterized by below-normal precipitation. This made deep plowing difficult and conditions for the germination of fall-sown grains unfavorable. However, fall sowing plans were claimed by the respective governments to have been fulfilled.

Unseasonable cold and rainy weather during March and the first half of April delayed spring field operations. Frost occurred in various sections of Hungary and Rumania in the middle of May, causing damage to vegetables, fruit trees, root crops, and corn. In many sections of Hungary, and probably Rumania, corn had to be replanted. The low temperatures retarded the growth of small grain but had no serious effects upon yields.

The last week in June and the month of July were characterized by low precipitation and high temperatures, which were particularly good for the development and harvesting of bread grains, barley, and oats. With reserves of soil moisture low, however, if this dry spell continues, yields of root crops, corn, forage, and sunflowers may be materially reduced. Corn damage will be particularly serious in Rumania and Albania, since in these countries the farm population is dependent upon corn for human food as well as for animal feed.

The yields of all crops probably will be less than in 1951, when above-average postwar yields were obtained because of very favorable growing conditions, particularly for both bread and coarse grains.

III. China.

Weather in China and Manchuria through July may be regarded as having been average, indicating that production may be equal to and probably greater than that in 1951. The wheat harvest was good, and prospects are favorable for rice.

After a winter with little rain and snowfall, which is normal, favorable weather prevailed throughout the country in May, producing what might be called a bumper wheat crop in North Kiangsu, Hopei, Honan, and Anhwei provinces which produce about 40 percent of China's wheat. Weather in Szechwan, an important wheat-producing province in the Southwest, has been average. Floods in North Szechwan and drought in South Szechwan are common, and there is no evidence that crops have been materially reduced.

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The Communists attributed the good wheat harvest to higher yields and an increase in acreage. Production and acreage percentages announced by the Chinese Communists do not, however, substantiate the claim of better-than-average yields. It is thought that some successes in the water conservancy programs (for example, the Huai Ho project) have contributed to the successful harvest, although the extent cannot be determined.

Previous fears of drought in East China -- in Kiangsu and North Anhwei -- were dispelled as a result of constant rainfall during the first few days of July, which was conducive to the early growth of summer sown crops.

The early crop in Hunan, the rice bowl of China, was at its heading stage in mid-June, 15 days earlier than in previous years. The crop was in a vigorous condition, and the yield is expected to be large. Three comparatively large floods occurred in parts of Hunan between the early part of April and the latter part of May. Floods are common in Hunan at this time of year, however, and damage to crops is not expected to be unusual. Seasonal rainfall in early July led to anticipation of an abundant early paddy harvest.

A serious dry spell developed in Honan following the wheat harvest, but sowing of summer crops can be delayed in most of the wheat region until 10 or 15 July. As of 23 July, it was announced that summer sowing had been successfully completed in Honan, North Kiangsu, North Anhwei, Shantung, Pingyuan, Hopei, Shansi, and Shensi provinces. Summer crops include corn, millet, kaoliang, sweet potatoes, and beans, which occupy over 45 percent of the total farmland in most of the above-named provinces.

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